

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

On behalf of Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Victoria

The Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's new National Cultural Policy.

ATOM is a professional association representing teachers, educators, researchers, and practitioners working in media, screen, and digital arts education across Victoria and Australia. Our members work directly with young people in schools, universities, cultural institutions, and community settings to develop critical, creative, and ethical engagement with media and screen culture.

As Australia's cultural landscape rapidly evolves through digital technologies, artificial intelligence, algorithmic media systems, misinformation, and deep fakes, Media and Screen Education has never been more important.

Young people are growing up in a world saturated by media. They are not simply consumers of culture, but active participants in its creation, circulation, interpretation, and transformation. A contemporary cultural policy must therefore recognise Media and Screen Education as essential cultural infrastructure.

ATOM strongly supports the National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) call for the inclusion of a sixth pillar within the National Cultural Policy: **Education**.

Without sustained investment in arts and cultural education, Australia risks undermining the very ecosystem required to sustain future creative industries, cultural participation, and informed democratic engagement.

Media literacy and screen literacy are now foundational civic capabilities. Young people require explicit education in how to:

- critically analyse and evaluate media information;
- recognise misinformation, disinformation, and manipulated media;
- understand the social, political, and cultural impacts of algorithms and AI-generated content;
- navigate increasingly complex digital communication environments; and
- ethically create and share their own media works.

Importantly, Media Education is not solely defensive or protective in nature. It is also deeply creative and culturally generative. Through media production, students learn how to communicate ideas, represent identities and communities, tell Australian stories, and contribute meaningfully to cultural life.

This work is increasingly urgent in the context of generative AI technologies and synthetic media. UNESCO's *Global Framework for Media and Information Literacy Curricula* highlights that Media and Information Literacy is now essential for democratic participation, cultural engagement, critical thinking, and social cohesion. UNESCO emphasises that young people require both analytical and creative competencies to participate safely and meaningfully within contemporary digital societies.

At the same time, Australia is experiencing a concerning decline in participation in Arts subjects and creative learning pathways. National advocates, researchers, and arts organisations have highlighted falling enrolments in senior secondary Arts subjects, declining university participation in creative arts degrees, and the closure of arts programs across Australia.

The consequences of this decline extend far beyond the arts sector itself. Arts and Media Education contribute to creativity, communication, empathy, collaboration, analytical thinking, and cultural understanding — capabilities increasingly recognised as essential within a rapidly changing technological world.

ATOM also acknowledges the advocacy work being undertaken by the [Save Our Arts campaign](#), which calls for stronger support for Australian stories, creative participation, and long-term cultural sustainability. Save Our Arts identifies declining engagement with Australian arts and culture, particularly among young people, as a significant national concern requiring coordinated policy action.

Schools and teachers play a critical role in addressing this challenge. Media classrooms are places where young Australians learn not only to interpret culture, but to create it. They are spaces where students engage critically with representation, identity, storytelling, ethics, and emerging technologies while developing their own voices as communicators and creators.

A strong National Cultural Policy must therefore recognise education as central to Australia's cultural future.

ATOM urges the Australian Government to:

- support the inclusion of **Education** as a sixth pillar within the National Cultural Policy;
- formally recognise Arts Education and Media Education as central components of Australia's cultural infrastructure;
- invest in Media and Information Literacy initiatives nationally;
- strengthen partnerships between cultural organisations, screen agencies, educators, and schools;
- support teacher professional learning in Media and Screen Education, particularly in relation to AI and emerging technologies; and
- recognise schools and educators as vital contributors to Australia's cultural ecosystem.

If Australia wishes to maintain a vibrant screen industry, informed public discourse, and strong cultural identity, we must invest not only in creative industries themselves, but in the education systems that sustain them.

ATOM welcomes continued opportunities to contribute to this important national conversation and to advocate for the essential role of Media and Screen Education within Australia's cultural future.

SUBMITTED BY THE ATOM VICTORIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Brett Jenkins: *Art & Technology Domain Leader and VCE Teacher at Upper Yarra Secondary College. Casual VCAA Media written exam assessor. ATOMVic Board and Education Committee member.*

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